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ABSTRACT

Private schools, which educate about 11 percent of all pupils, provide educational diversity and competition with the public schools. The results often take the forms of educational innovation and progress. Because mounting costs of teacher salaries, educational materials, and teaching aids are currently putting pressure on private school finance, further support from government, communities, industry, business, and endowments is drastically needed. (LLR)

FINANCING PRIVATE EDUCATION *

By Brother Anthony Wallace, FSC

The role of the private school has been well defined by President Nixon in his address to the 91st Congress on March 3, 1970:

"The nonpublic elementary and secondary schools in the United States have long been an integral part of the nation's educational establishment -- supplementing in an important way the main task of our public school system. The nonpublic schools provide a diversity which our educational system would otherwise lack. They also give a spur of competition to the public schools --through which educational innovations come, both systems benefit, and progress results..."

In this partial quote from his statement, the President brings home to us the important place of the private school in the educational history of our nation, and emphasizes the plurality that is a part of our American heritage. It is well for us to recall that the Constitution of the United States establishes no official system of education and that the preeminence of the public school system stems from a period in our history when legislatures established school systems to provide education for the children whose parents did not choose for them to attend schools with a Church affiliation. In course of time the State established public school was granted an unduly favored position by friendly legislatures, much to the detriment of other established systems performing the same service to the public.

In his message, the President notes the right of parents to choose the type of education they desire for their children when he speaks of the nonpublic school providing "a diversity which our educational system would otherwise lack." And we are all aware of the fact that the Supreme

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Court, in the historical *Pierce vs. Sisters* case of 1925, legally established the right of the parent to send children to the school of their choice. The Court at that time ruled:

"The fundamental theory of Liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for the additional obligations."

In our considerations we must keep in mind that the public purpose of compulsory education established by the States is equally achieved in a public or nonpublic school. But financial pressures today are placing the right of freedom of choice in jeopardy. Mounting costs of teacher salaries, purchase of materiel, teaching aids of all types, are seriously strapping the finances of not only public schools, but the nonpublic sector of education as well. What was once borne as a willing sacrifice has now become a burden to parents, and those who exercise their Constitutional right of freedom of choice are now asking for assistance. The United States Chamber of Commerce Report (1967) called attention to governmental bodies for serious consideration of this condition on the educational scene.

"We recommend that the government consider continuing to finance education of all children -- that it offer them, as an alternative to public education, financial support for private education up to the amount of the average per pupil cost in local public schools. We are led to this somewhat unusual conclusion by our belief in the importance of sound education and our concern that the present institutional structure in education may not be the best way to organize it."

If the mounting financial stress is not alleviated, it will become impossible for supporters of nonpublic schools to carry the burden. This will mean that new public school facilities will have to be provided, more teachers hired at mounting costs, with the result that all will pay more, receive less value for expenditures and create a monolithic system of education that denies our heralded freedom of choice, inhibits competition, and suppresses diversity in education.

The private sector of education must pay special attention to the phrases "diversity of education" and "a spur of competition." We should examine seriously whether we are offering an alternative system of education while providing the basic needs of students, or whether we are simply imitating what is being done in the public school. Do we avail ourselves of the opportunities we have to promote needed innovations in class structure, new techniques of teaching, individualized instruction and student self-learning? Operating under less restrictive School Board directives, being permitted opportunity to experiment with curriculum

change as long as we meet State Department of Education requirements, the nonpublic school should be initiating the experiments prompted by research and evaluating them in the light of student and societal needs. It must emphasize more innovative and flexible patterns of structure and teaching.

Parents supporting nonpublic education do expect their schools to offer something more than routine classroom instruction. They expect that the philosophy and objectives of their institutions will be concerned with moral and spiritual values, and will provide for the strengths and weaknesses of the students enrolled. Certainly the freedom of operation we boast should enable us to escape the scathing criticism of schools delivered by former Commissioner of Education Allen, in his address to the American Federation of Teachers in August, 1969:

"Do educators really know what they are doing? ... Let there be no mistake about it -- we have too many schools which fail to equip their students with fundamental skills such as the ability to read ... we have too many schools in which there is little or no individual instruction, where, for the most part, we still put students in educational strait jackets -- teaching at them rather than helping them to discover and learn for themselves ... Too much of American education consists of the same old subjects, taught in the same forty- and fifty-minute periods, in the same way, with rigid methods of storing and retrieving facts, and with a conspicuous disregard for social and intellectual variations."

Perhaps it is time for schools to give serious attention to some of the criticisms relating to a worn-out curriculum and, as Silberman says, "... our preoccupation with nonessentials."

Nonpublic education has been negligent in letting the public know the value of its product and in exploring the possibilities of support from industry, community, business and endowments. The millions of graduates of the nonpublic schools have been loyal citizens of this country, serving valiantly in all forms of national endeavor, and many giving their very lives for the support of the principles they were taught in school. These graduates have contributed to the economy of our country and many are in positions to appreciate the need for closer relations between education and the public economy. There must be more effort on the part of private education to secure both the goodwill and financial help of the public at large.

Likewise, private schools must give greater thought to consortiums, amalgamation, and consolidations. The time limits of this paper do not permit me the liberty to discuss each of these items in detail but, certainly, for the Church related schools, consolidation and amalgamation are long overdue. In conjunction with consolidation, greater consideration must be given to wider use of personnel. There is no solid reason why teachers cannot be exchanged and employed among schools rather than just in a particular school. The Church related schools, in particular, must give far greater emphasis to this phase of personnel development.

I believe we have to move toward total education rather than just schooling. It is for this reason that I strongly advocate that the private school systems develop educational centers which will serve the

whole community -- not only for schooling of children but also to provide continuing education and sponsor social and cultural activities. If we expect to receive support for education rather than just schooling, we must make our facilities serviceable to the entire community not just the students.

Despite the internal changes private education might make, there still remains their just claim to some type support from both federal and state monies. I think it is folly to discuss partnership, use of the tax dollar now allotted to public schools, or equal share ideas. However, it is my conviction that the services rendered by the nonpublic schools must be acknowledged by federal and state financial assistance. We in education know that our public schools are in financial difficulties of their own and the tax dollars available to public schools could hardly be expected to be further stretched by aid to other types of education.

If education is a national resource and youth is the most important commodity for the future of our country, then, I am sure that funds can be found to develop this commodity. President Nixon in his address to Congress stated:

"Should any single school system -- public or private -- ever acquire a complete monopoly over the education of our children, the absence of competition would neither be good for that school system nor good for the country. The nonpublic schools also give parents the opportunity to send their children to a school of their choice, and of their own religious denomination. They offer a wider range of possibilities for educational experimentation and special opportunities for minorities, especially Spanish-speaking Americans and Black Americans.

"Up to now, we have failed to consider the consequence of declining enrollments in private elementary and secondary schools, most of them Church supported, which educate 11% of all pupils -- close to six million school children. In the past two years, close to a thousand nonpublic elementary and secondary schools closed and most of their displaced students enrolled in local public schools."

Our government has recognized the need for assistance for all types of education, yet, in practice, elementary and secondary education has gone begging. All of us know of the great expansion of our colleges after World War II, and we are also well aware that this expansion was due primarily to the assistance of our government with such things as the GI Bill; federal loans to students; federal loans for buildings of dormitories, student union buildings, etc. Hardly a college campus in the country does not reflect governmental aid in its expansion program. And I might add, that privately endowed and Church affiliated institutions have shared in this governmental service without the great cry of 'separation of Church and State' being raised. So, too, the tiresome reiteration of the so-called sanctity of the 'wall of separation between Church and State' has become meaningless. We know that once accepted laws have been changed to meet the needs of justice and social change, for example, prior to the court decision on segregation, ten states had legislative enactments forbidding the integration of the races, and the same prohibition was an Act of Congress in the District of Columbia, Yet, 1954 changed all that.

Our federal government is in the midst of a vast defense spending program but this, please God, will not be an eternal circumstance. We must plan for the time when our vast resources will be more available for domestic issues. The tax dollar of our people has been stretched to the utmost. Aid must come from national and state sources for education plans for the future to become a reality.

If private schools are to be able to offer quality education, new sources of revenue must be secured for them. I will grant that the prestigious private schools may be able to continue by reason of high tuition costs, but the bulk of the private schools, many of them where no tuition is charged, have reached the limit of cost to their clientele. Many formulas have been suggested for this new source of revenue. Most of us are familiar with the various voucher plans, dual enrollment, shared time, state scholarships, tuition grants, purchase of services, and less-discussed procedures. To attempt to discuss in detail any one of these programs would be redundant to this audience. We have read through volumes dealing with the purported alternatives proposed for nonpublic education. Specific solutions will have to be geared to local conditions and local need. There can be no general formula that is going to meet the crisis in each situation, but I would like to call attention of my audience to the statement of Stephen Arons, Staff Attorney at the Center for Law and Education at Harvard, in a Saturday Review article:

"The consequences of these bills — their failure to support adequately secular, non-elitist schools, their failure to equalize

"the bargaining position of the poor and middle class, their failure to foster competition and diversity, and their failure to provide for significant influence by parents -- tend simply to extend and reproduce all the failures of the public schools. They are indeed unfortunate consequences, but one further consequence of these laws is intolerable: the lack of effective barriers to prevent racial discrimination.'

(Saturday Review, January 16, 1971, page 47.)

And we should read carefully Mr. Aron's further discussion as to the manner in which he envisions the proposed voucher system, meeting each of the objections raised in discussing other types of federal aid.

"...It(the voucher plan) does not divide the electorate into those favoring increased public school funds and those seeking to divert public funds to private schools, because every child's education is paid for by voucher, regardless of which school he attends. The level of support is adequate to meet all operational costs of running a school, eliminating the need to rely upon private funding with its inherently discriminatory effects. Aid is delivered per capita and is skewed in favor of the poor and working classes, providing significant bargaining power to those in low-income brackets and incentives to schools to enroll disadvantaged children. Diversity is aided by relying for education standards on the state minimums that already govern a wide range of private schools. Furthermore, since the insulation of Church and State is accomplished by creating a system that, similar to the one in the GI Bill, substitutes the individual for the state in deciding which schools receive aid, no complex

of secularizing regulations is needed. The plan is carefully designed to provide school data sufficient to allow an informed choice by parents. Finally, the lottery provisions and the provision of free transportation for students provide a reliable protection against racial discrimination." (Saturday Review, January 16, 1971, page 56.)

Regardless of what method is adopted, private education must convince its clientele that it is offering quality education. Assuring quality education demands the services of teachers who have every right to expect adequate remuneration for their ability and their service. Thus, we can be sure that teacher cost will continue to be a prime expense item in the budget of any private school.

The super-charged issue at the moment in the arena of financing education is support for nonpublic education. The many court cases, argued equally well and sincerely by both sides, await the decisions of the Supreme Court. As one who has given forty years of his life to teaching youth at all levels of education, who has witnessed thousands of his students render service to their communities and country in professional life, business life, the armed services and other endeavors, I naturally feel that the students for whom I have labored, and continue to labor, are as American and patriotic as the students from public education; that the academic programs of the schools in which I have taught are as demanding and profitable as those of any neighboring schools; that if justice is to be measured equally to all groups in these days of great social strife, the ignored sector of private education must be given con-

sideration and support. It is performing a service vital to the public welfare. As the legislature of Pennsylvania has stated in enacting the Purchase of Services Act:

"The State of Pennsylvania faces a major educational crisis ... the services of nonpublic schools are essential to help meet the crisis, and unless the State provides some financial aid to help keep these schools in business an intolerable added financial burden to the public would result."

In their 1969-70 Annual Report, the School Superintendents' Department of the NCEA states:

"The growing financial crisis affecting all American education has been felt especially by the nonpublic schools. It has led to the closing of many of these schools and will result in the closing of many more in the near future unless help from the general community is forthcoming. President Nixon in establishing the Commission on School Finance has requested that 'the specific problem of parochial schools is to be a particular assignment of this Commission.'

"The President in this same message reiterated an important contribution of nonpublic schools: 'There is another equally important consideration: these schools - nonsectarian, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and others - often add a dimension of spiritual value giving children a moral code by which to live. This government cannot be indifferent to the potential collapse of such schools.'

"As a matter of law, the right of private educational institutions to exist and the right of their students to receive certain public assistance have been constitutionally protected. When the state embarks on a general program of secular educational assistance - that is to say, a program which has a secular legislative purpose and a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion - then all youth within the purview of the program regardless of the school they attend are constitutionally qualified to participate in and receive the benefits of the program."

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